

Chapter 2

Principles to Guide Historic Preservation Projects

This chapter presents basic principles that apply to Landmark properties and properties within Historic Districts. It includes a discussion of the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Treatment of Historic Properties. Within the Historic Preservation Chapter of the City Code, the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties are specified as the standards to be used for preservation development projects involving Landmark and Historic District properties.

Background of Preservation Development Project Standards

What are Preservation Development Project Standards?

Design standards convey community policies for neighborhoods, business districts and architectural sites through landscape and urban design. Relative to historic properties and historic districts, they provide a common basis for making decisions about work that may affect the preservation of individual properties or the overall character-defining features of a district. Preservation standards in the City of Sacramento, and in general, involve the preservation of historic features and materials. They also affect the design of a proposed project.

The California Historical Building Code, the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties and these Preservation Development Project Standards include the objective to preserve significant historic fabric, not only the appearance of certain features of a property. Sacramento's "Design Review Districts" guidelines generally do not include objectives concerning the preservation of original materials.

The Basic Principles for Preservation in Sacramento

While these standards provide direction for specific preservation development projects, some basic principles of preservation form the foundation for them. The following preservation principles apply in Sacramento:

1. Respect the historic design of the building.

Don't try to change a building's style or make it look older than it really is. Confusing the character by mixing elements of different styles is not appropriate.

2. Protect and maintain significant details and stylistic elements.

Distinctive materials stylistic features or examples of skilled craftsmanship should be treated with sensitivity. The best preservation procedure is to maintain historic features through proper maintenance from the outset so that intervention is not required. This includes rust removal, caulking, limited paint removal and reapplication of paint.

3. Preserve key form and character of the property or district.

Key features are those that help convey the character of the resource as it appeared during its period of historic significance. These may include the building's proportions, basic structural system and windows and doors, porches, roof form and patterns of "solids" and "voids" in exterior facades. Typically, those features that are on the front of a building or that are highly visible from a public way will be most important.

4. Repair deteriorated historic features, and replace only those elements that cannot be repaired.

Maintain historic material, using recognized treatment methods that do not harm original materials or finishes.

Basic Principles for Historic Preservation

The Concept of Historic Significance

What makes a property historically significant? It is generally recognized that a certain amount of time must pass before the historical significance of a property can be evaluated. The National Register, for example, suggests that a property be at least 50 years old or have extraordinary importance before it may be considered for listing.

The City of Sacramento Historic Preservation Chapter of the City Code states that a property may be significant where:

- It is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of the history of Sacramento, the region, the state or the nation;
- It is associated with the lives of persons significant to Sacramento's past;
- It embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction;

- It represents the work of an important creative individual or master;
- It possesses high artistic values; or
- It has yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important in the prehistory or history of Sacramento, the region, the state or the nation.

Period of Significance

Every historic resource has a period of significance—or the time span during which it gained architectural, historical or cultural importance. A property is significant because it represents or is associated with a particular period or specific dates in history or in the life of a person. Frequently, for properties that are architecturally significant, this period of significance is its construction date and may also include the dates of subsequent additions or alterations. Portions of the building fabric that date from the period of significance typically contribute to the character-defining features of the structure.

Concept of “Integrity”

In addition to being historically significant, a property or a historic district also must have integrity—which means a sufficient percentage of the structure must exhibit characteristics from the period of significance. In the case of a historic district, contributing resources must exist in sufficient numbers and in good condition. A majority of the building’s structural system and its materials should date from the period of significance and its key character-defining features should be intact. These may include architectural details, such as dormers and porches, ornamental brackets and moldings, materials such as exterior siding, as well as the overall mass and form of the building. It is these elements that allow a building to be recognized as a product of its time.

Original Materials

Preserve primary historic building materials. Original materials contribute to the historic fabric of a structure or historic district. Retain and preserve original wall and siding materials as well as types of finish that are in good condition or that can be repaired in place. Do not cover or obscure original materials; this would change the character of the structure. Property owners should repair deteriorated, primary building materials by patching, piecing-in, consolidating or otherwise reinforcing them. When replacement of material is needed, use materials similar to those employed historically. See chapter 4 for detailed standards for materials.

Alterations

Many historic houses have been altered over time, as design tastes changed or need for additional space was needed. Many early alterations were subordinate in scale and character to the main building. Alterations were often executed using materials that were similar to those used originally.

Some early alterations may have taken on historic significance of their own. An addition constructed in a manner that was compatible in scale, materials and placement with the original building and that is associated with the period of significance may merit preservation in its own right.

In contrast, it is highly unlikely that more recent alterations have historic significance. Additions that detract from the character of the building and may obscure significant features would be allowed to be removed. In these cases, the area where the addition attached to the original structure could be restored to its original design, or a replacement addition of a more compatible design could be considered. The particulars of each case relative to the historic structure and its significant features and characteristics and the area of the historic structure where the inappropriate addition was located, would factor into the decision on whether a new replacement addition could be an appropriate project. The Preservation Development Project Standards in this document will discuss the removal of such additions or alterations and returning the feature to approximate its original configuration.

It should be noted that the tradition of alterations and additions to historic structures is anticipated to continue. It is important, however, that new alterations be designed in such a manner that they preserve the historic character and features of the structure and complement its architectural vocabulary, scale and materials.

There is an important balance between changes needed to accommodate new uses or lifestyle needs and the preservation of key character-defining features of a historic resource or district. In some cases, rear or secondary facades can accommodate more change; in other cases, non-contributing structures can accommodate a great deal of change. How that change is designed to minimize impact on the historic structure’s or district’s significant character-defining features, is what this document seeks to identify.

New Additions

When planning an addition to a historic structure, a key objective is to minimize impacts to the historic building’s fabric and character-defining features. While some destruction of historic materials is almost always a part of constructing an addition, the objective will be to keep such loss at a minimum and affect less significant elements and features of the historic structure. It should be noted that not all proposed additions will be able

to achieve this objective and may not be able to comply with these standards. See chapter 5 for detailed standards for additions.

Infill New Construction

Designing a building to fit within the historic character of a neighborhood requires careful thought. Preservation does not mean that a neighborhood or historic district must be “frozen” in time, but it does mean that, when new building occurs, it should be in a manner that reinforces the basic visual characteristics of a block or the historic district. This does not imply, however, that a new building must look old. In fact, imitating historic styles is generally discouraged. A new design should relate to the fundamental characteristics of the historic houses on a block while also conveying the stylistic trends of today. See chapter 8 for detailed standards for infill structures.

Interiors

While interior alteration of private residences are not “development projects” per the Historic Preservation Chapter of the City Code*, use of the California Historical Building Code may offer helpful options for preservation of historic interiors. Historic homes with original character-defining elements are considered desirable, often adding to the value, as resale. For neighborhood commercial projects, work involving significant, publicly-accessible interiors are considered “development projects” for preservation review.

*Environmental reviews pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) may involve the consideration of project impact on the interiors of historic resources.

Sense of Place

Structures in a neighborhood often share common characteristics which provide a sense of place. These elements can include similarity in setbacks from the street, scale, form and orientation which combine to establish a rhythm and development pattern for a street. These design elements will be addressed in the Infill New Construction chapter.